



**Communication
for
Change**

**Strategies for working
with the community**

**Centre for Development Communication
DHAN Foundation, Madurai**

Strategies for working with the community

The community strategies for communication aim at educating the community and enabling and empowering the community to improve its existing conditions. These conditions may be related to health, nutrition education or other societal issues. The basic objects of the community strategy is thus strengthening and equipping the community members to think for themselves and take appropriate action to ensure everyone's wellbeing.

Individual or small group strategies that have been discussed in sections 14.2 and 14.3 of chapter help individuals or small sections of the community to bring about changes in themselves or in their families. But you would have come across many problems and issues which affect the entire community and which cannot be solved or addressed by individuals or small segments of the community. For example, problems like "Unsafe drinking water", "Lack of health facilities in an area", "Lack of schooling facilities beyond primary level in a village". "Menace of stray dogs and cattle in an area" etc., are such problems that cannot be tackled by individuals or small groups. In such cases, the entire community has to get together and take collective action so that the situation can be dealt with.

Many a times it has been observed that people accept situations like the ones

mentioned above as a part and parcel of their lives, either due to their ignorance that these do not affect the quality of their lives or due to apathy and disillusionment that nothing can be done to improve the existing conditions. Thus, they resign to the prevailing undesirable conditions. This is where your role becomes very important. You, as an agent of change, can use community strategies of communication to educate the people, and organize them into an effective force that can take on the challenges of bringing about the necessary changes in the system to improve their quality of life.

The first step thus is EDUCATING the community and the second step is EMPOWERING the community for taking necessary action

Educating and Empowering the Community

Educating the community about the hazards arising from the various problems that exist in their area is essential because until the community members get convinced that they are being harmed, they will always consider it to be *your problem* because you have perceived it and *not their own*.

For example, if you observe that there are many stray dogs in an area and people, especially children are at a risk of rabies you would like to discuss this problem with the people in the community. But if you look at the situation, from their angle, there have always been stray dogs around and they do not appear to be causing any

inconvenience. Some people may have been bitten by these dogs and would have suffered, some may have died also. Yet for most people it is an accepted aspect of their life. If you educate the people about rabies and its spread, the need for immunization of dogs to prevent rabies and also inform them that municipal corporation can be pressurised to take away the stray dogs which belong to no one, perhaps all people can come together to take action.

The same may be true of unsafe/contaminated water supply. If you educate the people about how an unsafe supply of drinking water will lead to diseases like cholera, gastroenteritis, diarrhea, jaundice and typhoid, people will certainly come together to take action which will result in getting rid of the problem.

It is also important to remember that not all people in a community have leadership qualities. But in every community, there are some people who are influential in their own capacity. They may be referred to as opinion leaders. You, as a change agent, can enhance and develop this leadership and form groups/clubs/committees to work as pressure groups who will work towards the common cause/goal on behalf of the entire community – of course, with its support and encouragement. This, in other words, can be termed as *enabling and empowering* of the community to think and act for its own good.

Steps to Implement Community Strategies

Now let us study the steps that are required for the implementation of community strategies. There are three basic steps:

- Identification of opinion leaders who influence the community
- Informing and educating the community
- Formation of Committees, Pressure groups, Advisory/Planning Boards etc., so that the community gets collective leadership for its action to improve conditions.

1) Identification of Opinion Leaders

In any community, locality, town or village there are always some people who are respected by everyone. People may respect them because they are leaders or very good at their work (professionals like Doctor, Lawyer) or because they are experienced and wise people who guide and help others at the time of crisis and with routine problems arising out of the day to day situations. People usually go to such persons and seek their advice. These people are called *Opinion Leaders* because people value their opinions on different matters. When opinion leaders talk, people listen to them and act on their advice.

You can identify opinion leaders by asking the people: "Whom do you go to for advice whenever there is any problem?" If may

people mention some common names, you can be sure that they are opinion leaders whose judgment is valued and whose pronouncements matter. It is quite possible that the 'Pradhan', 'Municipal Counsellor', 'MLA', 'Sarpanch', 'Teacher', 'Priest', 'Imam' etc. may be the opinion leaders. However, it is equally possible that these political and religious heads are actually not really concerned with people's problems in the community and therefore, people do not value their opinion much. You may also find that within any community, there could be groupism and each group may be affiliated to different opinion leaders. In such a case, it would be wide to seek support of all the opinion leader.

Seeking support of Opinion Leaders

Once you have identified the opinion leaders of the community, you must meet each one of them individually and assess their ideas about the particular problem that you wish to sort out or the specific development plan(s) you may have in mind for the betterment of that community.

If your ideas appeal to them the battle is half won because you are sure to get their support in mobilization of the community. These leaders play a very important role in influencing and encouraging people to adopt and sustain new practices

Remember to meet and talk to these leaders in a respectful manner and convince them that you value their leadership in the community. Once you establish such a bond with these leaders, communicating with the people becomes easy.

2) Informing and Educating the Community

Organizing a Campaign

Organization of a campaign is by far the best communication strategy when all the people in an area need to be give any type of information, so that they can come together and take collective action.

When we have to reach all members of the community, the campaign approach is the best.

Campaign, by definition, is a series of activities organized for a limited period of time using each and every available channel of communication. Thus the campaign approach centered around themes or issues like "Immunize you child", "Send your child to school", "Clean environment for good health", "Food for health", can be organized through a series of activities like the following.

- Procession
- Street Play
- Wall writing
- Street corner meeting
- Drama/Puppet show/Ballad
- Slogans/Songs/Parodies
- Competition/Quiz

For the successfully implementation of any programme, public awareness is extremely important and campaign is basically a

carefully planned and executed public information programme.

It should be organized as soon as the problem issue has been identified by either the community members, their leaders or is generally recognized by all in the community (like the unhygienic, pollution etc.). Hence the campaign is organized to deal with a *real* problem

The duration of any campaign should be between 3-7 days. If need be, the duration may be reduced to 2 days or increased to upto 15 days.

Planning

Table 2.1. Plan for campaign on 'Clean Environment of good Health'.

Day	Time	Activity	Persons Involved	Material Required
1)	10.00 a.m. - 11.00 a.m.	Procession	All People - men, women, youth, children	* Banner * Placards * Songs * Slogans
2)	All through the day as convenient	Wall writing	-do-	* Slogans * Colours * Paint * Brushes
3)	Afternoon/Evening	Street Plays or	Team who has prepared the play & community	-
		Street Meeting	Opinion leaders & community	-
4)	Late evening	Community Meetings	Options Leaders & Influential persons	* Public Address System * Handouts
5)	Morning/Evening	"BEST CLEAN LAND/HOUSE" Competition	* Community as participants * Judges	* Prizes

A thorough planning is essential for organizing an effective campaign. Let us study the following tabular plan of a campaign on *Clean Environment for Good Health*.

You will see from the above table that for organizing a campaign of five days duration, five different activities are scheduled such that every day there is one activity.

- Organization of these activities as mentioned in the programme or campaign schedule, requires a lot of preparation. Even for a simple campaign like "Wall-writing" the tasks involved are:
- Coining catchy slogans

- Selecting young boys and girls who will write these slogans on the walls
- Selecting the sights (walls) where the slogans will be written. These may include walls in the market place, *chaupal* of the village, local bus stops, railings at the cross-bridges etc.
- Procuring writing material like wash-resistant paints, soft-coal, red-brick powder, brushes etc.
- Obtaining permission from the owners/ community members to write the slogans on the walls.

These preparations take time and advance planning and require mobilization of community members and other resources like money and materials.

Use of various methods and variety of activities will help to enhance the impact of message. It will also help to add and sustain interest, and provide opportunities to the community to work together collectively for the campaign theme. In this case, digging of compost pits, garbage disposal, and channelization of waste water etc. would be collective activities of the community to make the area clean.

Follow-up

A successfully organized campaign that lasts for about a week can create excitement and interest. But no problem gets solved if people remain active for just about 3-5 days. A

campaign is basically organized to educate and motivate the community to take action. If these activities, say of keeping the area/locality clean, are not sustained by the people, the area will lapse into unhygienic conditions. A follow-up of the campaign by home visits, small group meetings and all the small group and individual strategies of communication learnt in Unit 13 would help in sustaining the impact of this campaign in maintaining a clean and healthy environment.

With all your good intentions, dedication and willingness to work for the betterment of the community, can you do all these tasks mentioned above, all by yourself? The answer is 'No'. One of the most effective ways of achieving community participation is the third step: formation of committees. Let us learn how such committees are formed.

3) Formation of Committees

You have already read about the need for identifying opinion leaders and the role they play in mobilizing community opinion. But even the most effective opinion leaders cannot bring about all the necessary changes on their own. They can at best get people together and motivate them for action.

But as you can well understand that when a large number of people (50-100) meet together, all do not get the chance to speak. A lot of time is spent in making all the people understand what you wish to say and not

many among them offer solutions to the problems an issued raised. Some among them may consider such meetings to be a waste of time and thus try to force quick decisions on the group without going into many details. This many result in dissatisfaction or even chaos within the group.

In order to avoid such happenings, **small group or committees can be formed** after the entire community has identified and discussed the problem. Of course, the committee members must be chosen with the approval of all the people. For example, one group could be termed as the *Advisory Board* which can help to *identify the priority needs* and thus *plan and guide* the community towards appropriate action, while the other group or committee could be *the Task Force* which would actually put *the plan into action* at the community level.

You would be playing a very important role in the establishment of such an Advisory Board and Task Force

For any committee to be effective, it is essential that its members are held in esteem by the majority of the people in the community and that these members are willing to work hard for the betterment of all community members irrespective of caste, faith, religion or political affiliation.

Since you have been working with children and people in an area, you can easily identify the persons who can serve as members of these committees. With the help of opinion leaders and

the support of the general public, you can be instrumental in establishing effective committees.

These committees have specific tasks to perform. These may include:

- Collecting information on the specific issues.
- Identifying viewpoints of people and reasons for the problems(s).
- Proposing solutions and planning action.
- Mobilizing community support and participation in solving the problem.
- Keeping the community informed and up-to-date on the progress made.
- Follow-up of the decision taken and actions initiated towards improvement of the situation or solving of the problem.

You role would essentially remain as that of an *Anchor Person* who will be instrumental in *strengthening the ability of people to solve their problems using their own resources*.

You can guide and encourage people, praise their successes and discuss the reasons for failure, if any. Thus you would be helping in motivating the community to take action, improve their own well-being and develop self-reliance in the true spirit of an agent of change.